

one develops by pulling away hostilely from the past. The relation between form and content (the latter is to be understood not simply as a 'theme' but as a living complex of moods and ideas which seek artistic expression) is determined by the fact that a new form is discovered, proclaimed and developed under the pressure of an inner need, of a collective psychological demand, which, like human psychology, has its roots in society.

This explains the dualism of every literary tendency; on the one hand, it adds something to the technique of art, heightening (or lowering) the general level of craftsmanship; on the other hand, in its concrete historical form, it expresses definite demands which, in the final analysis, have a class character. We are class, but this also means individual, because a class speaks through an individual. It also means national, because the spirit of a nation is determined by the class which rules it and which subjects literature to itself. [ . . . ]

What are we to understand under the term realism? At various periods, as by various methods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of different social groups. Each one of these realistic schools is subject to a separate and social literary definition, and a separate formal and literary estimation. What have they in common? A definite and important feeling for the world. It consists in a feeling for life as it is, in an artistic acceptance of reality, and not in shrinking from it, in an active interest in the concrete stability and mobility of life. It is a striving either to picture life as it is or to idealize it, either to justify or to condemn it, either to photograph it or generalize and symbolize it, but it is always a preoccupation with our life of three dimensions as a sufficient and invaluable theme for art. In this large philosophical sense and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with certainty that the next will be realistic. [ . . . ]

This means a realistic monism, in the sense of a philosophy of life, and not a 'realism' in the sense of the traditional arsenal of literary schools. On the contrary, the new artist will need all the methods and processes evolved in the past, as well as a few supplementary ones, in order to grasp the new life. And this is not going to be artistic eclecticism, because the unity of art is created by an active world-attitude and active life-attitude. [ . . . ]

## 2 André Breton (1896–1966) from the First Manifesto of Surrealism

Breton was introduced to Freudian analysis [see Ia4] while serving in a medical capacity in the First World War. After the apparent exhaustion of Dada, Breton assumed the leadership of the left wing of the avant-garde, opposing the irrational and the work of the subconscious to the nationalism and technicism of the Esprit Nouveau group [see IIIa7]. To this end he articulated the definitive formulation of the concept of Surrealism. The term had been coined by Apollinaire, who had also promoted the idea of a 'new spirit' [see IIIa2]. Breton's first Manifesto of Surrealism was originally published in Paris in 1924. The present extracts are taken from the translation by R. Seaver and H.R. Lane in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Michigan, 1969.

[ Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality. The mere word 'freedom' is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism. It doubtless satisfies my only legitimate aspiration. Among all the many misfortunes to which we are tormented, it is only fair to admit that we are allowed the greatest degree of freedom of thought. It is up to us not to misuse it. To reduce the imagination to a state of slavery – even though it would mean the elimination of what is commonly called happiness – is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself. Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction, enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake (as though it were possible to make a bigger mistake). Where does it begin to turn bad, and where does the mind's stability cease? For the mind, is the possibility of erring not rather the contingency of good? ]

There remains madness, 'the madness that one locks up,' as it has aptly been ascribed. That madness or another. . . . We all know, in fact, that the insane owe their incarceration to a tiny number of legally reprehensible acts and that, were it not for these acts their freedom (or what we see as their freedom) would not be threatened. I am willing to admit that they are, to some degree, victims of their imagination, in that it induces them not to pay attention to certain rules outside of which the species feels itself threatened – which we are all supposed to know and respect. But their profound indifference to the way in which we judge them and even to the various punishments meted out to them, allows us to suppose that they derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination, that they enjoy their madness sufficiently to endure the thought that its validity does not extend beyond themselves. And, indeed, hallucinations, illusions, etc., are not a source of trifling pleasure. [ . . . ]

The case against the realistic attitude demands to be examined, following the case against the materialistic attitude. The latter, more poetic in fact than the former, admittedly implies on the part of man a kind of monstrous pride which, admittedly, is monstrous, but not a new and more complete decay. It should above all be viewed as a welcome reaction against certain ridiculous tendencies of spiritualism. Finally, it is not incompatible with a certain nobility of thought.

By contrast, the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit. It is this attitude which today gives birth to these ridiculous books, these insulting plays. It constantly feeds on and derives strength from the newspapers and stultifies both science and art by assiduously flattering the lowest of tastes, clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life. The activity of the best minds feels the effects of it, the law of the lowest common denominator finally prevails upon them as it does upon the others. [ . . . ]

\* \* \*

We are still living under the reign of logic . . . But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating

directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself in increasingly circumscribed limits, back and forth in a cage, from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately experienced; and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense. Under the pressure of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practice. It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which was pretended not to be concerned with any longer — and, in my opinion by far the most important part — has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. (On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally forming, by means of which the human psyche will be able to carry his investigations much further, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. This imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its right to the depths of our mind, contain within its strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them, — first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason. The analysts themselves have everything to gain by it.) But it is worth noting that no means has been designated a priori for carrying out this undertaking; that until further notice it can be construed to be the province of poets as well as scholars, and that its success is dependent upon the more or less capricious paths that will be followed.

Freud very rightly brought his critical faculties to bear upon the dream. It is, in fact, inadmissible that this considerable portion of psychic activity (since at least from man's birth until his death, thought offers no solution of continuing the sum of the moments of dream, from the point of view of time, and fails to consider only the time of pure dreaming, that is the dreams of sleep) is not inferior to the sum of the moments of reality, or, to be more precise, limiting, the moments of waking) has still today been so grossly neglected. He has always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams. It is because man, when he ceases to sleep, is about to play the part of his memory, and in its normal state memory takes pleasure in weakly retelling for him the circumstances of the dream, in stripping it of its real importance, and in dismissing the only *determinant* from the point when he thinks he has left it a few hours before this firm hope, this concern, under the impression of continuing something that is worthwhile. Thus the dream finds itself reduced to a mere parenthesis, as is the night. And life is night, dreams generally contribute little to furthering our understanding. The curious state of affairs seems to me to call for certain reflections.

Within the limits where they operate (or are, thought to operate) dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization. Men alone arrogate to themselves the right to ignore dreams, to ignore the agonizing question of possibility is no longer pertinent. Kill, fly faster,

kill like to provide it with the key to this corridor. The mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him. The agonizing question of possibility is no longer pertinent. Kill, fly faster,

love to your heart's content. And if you should die, are you not certain  
reawaking among the dead? Let yourself be carried along, events will not tolerate  
your interference. You are nameless. The ease of everything is priceless.  
What reason, I ask, a reason so much vaster than the others, makes dream  
seem so natural and allows me, to welcome unreservedly a welter of episodes so  
strange that they would confound me now as I write? And yet I can believe at  
eyes, my ears, this great day has arrived, this beast has spoken.

If man's awaking is harder, if it breaks the spell too abruptly, it is because  
he has been led to make for himself too impoverished a notion of a moment  
of time. From the moment when it is subjected to a methodical examination, when  
by means yet to be determined we succeed in recording the contents of dream  
in their entirety (and that presupposes a discipline of memory spanning genera-  
tions; but let us nonetheless begin by noting the most salient facts), when a  
graph will expand with unparalleled volume and regularity, we may hope the  
mysteries which really are not will give way to the great Mystery. I believe  
in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which at  
seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one  
may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to  
find it, but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree  
the joys of its possession.

A story is told according to which Saint-Pol-Roux, in times gone by, used to  
have a notice posted on the door of his manor house in Camaret, every evening  
before he went to sleep, which read: THE POET IS WORKING.

A great deal more could be said, but, in passing, I merely wanted to mark a point as  
upon a subject which in itself would require a very long and much more delicate  
discussion. At this juncture, my intention was merely to mark a point as  
noting the *hate of the marvelous* which rages in certain men; this absurd  
beneath which they try to bury it. Let us, not mine words, the marvelous  
always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful; in fact only the marvelous  
beautiful.

One evening before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that  
was impossible to change a word, but nonetheless removed from the sound of  
any voice, a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent  
relationship to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was the  
involved, a phrase which seemed to me inconsistent, a phrase, if I may be so bold  
~~which was striking at the window~~. I took a cursory note of it and prepared to  
move on when its organic character caught my attention. Actually, this phrase  
astonished me; unfortunately I cannot remember it exactly, but it was something  
like: 'There is a man cut in two by the window,' but there could be no question  
of ambiguity, accompanied as it was by the faint visual image of a man walking  
out half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body. Beyond the  
slightest shadow of a doubt, what I saw was the simple reconstruction in the  
mind of a man leaning out a window. But this window having shifted with the mu-  
tual realization that I was dealing with an image of a fairly rare sort, and all I could  
think of was to incorporate it into my material for poetic construction. A

completely occupied as I still was with Freud, at that time, and familiar as I  
was with his methods of examination which I had had some slight occasion to  
use on some patients during the war, I resolved to obtain from myself what we  
were trying to obtain from them, namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as  
possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a mono-  
logue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as  
fast as possible, akin to *spoken thought*. It had seemed to me, and still does  
the way in which the phrase about the man cut in two had come to me is  
an indication of it — that the speed of thought is no greater than the speed of  
speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the  
fast-moving pen. It was in this frame of mind that Philippe Soupault — to whom  
I had confided these initial conclusions — and I decided to blacken some paper  
with a praiseworthy disdain for what might result from a literary point of view.  
The case of execution did the rest. By the end of the first day we were able  
to read to ourselves some fifty or so pages obtained in this manner, and began  
to compare our results... All in all, Soupault's pages and mine proved to be  
remarkably similar: the same overconstruction, shortcomings of a similar nature,  
but also, on both our parts, the illusion of an extraordinary verve, a great deal  
of emotion, a considerable choice of images of a quality such that we would  
not have been capable of preparing a single one in longhand, as very special  
peculiarities of quality and, here and there, a strong comical effect. The only  
difference between our two texts seemed to me to derive essentially from our  
respective temperaments. Soupault's being less static than mine, and, if he does not  
and my offering this one slight criticism, from the fact that he had made the  
error of putting a few words by way of titles at the top of certain pages; I  
suppose in a spirit of mystification. On the other hand, I must give credit where  
credit is due and say that, he constantly and vigorously opposed any effort to  
touch or correct, however slightly, any passage of this kind which seemed to  
be unfortunate. In this he was, to be sure, absolutely right. It is, in fact, difficult  
to appreciate fairly the various elements present; one may even go so far as to  
say that it is impossible to appreciate them at a first reading. To you who write,  
these elements are, on the surface, as *strange to you as they are to anyone else*,  
and naturally you are wary of them. Poetically speaking, what strikes you about  
them above all is their *extreme degree of immediate absurdity*; the quality of this  
absurdity, upon closer scrutiny, being to give way to everything admissible,  
everything legitimate in the world; the disclosure of a certain number of  
properties and of facts no less objective, in the final analysis, than the others;

In hommage to Guillaume Apollinaire, who had just died and who, on several  
occasions, seemed to us to have followed a discipline of this kind, without

Those who might dispute our right to employ the term SURREALISM in the very special sense that we understand it are being extremely dishonest, for there can be no doubt that this word had no currency before we came along. Therefore, I am defining it once and for all:

**ENCYCLOPEDIA.** *Philosophy.* Surrealism is based on the belief in the supposed reality of certain forms of previously-neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all principal problems of life. [See J. BORGES, "SURREALISMUS IN ARGENTINA," *REVISTA DE LITERATURA ARGENTINA*, 1928.]

*having gone astray*, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's 'real life'; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his laissez-passer, only a few compliments. Rickety childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about an effective, risk-free possession of oneself. Thanks to Surrealism, it seems that opportunity knocks a second time. It is as though we were still running toward our salvation, or our perdition. In the shadow we again see a precious tent. Thank God it is still only Purgatory. With a shudder, we cross what

occultists call *dangeous territory*. In my wake I raise up monsters that are waiting; they are not yet too ill-disposed toward me, and I am not lost.

Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete nonconformity with

enough so that there can be no question or translating it, at the same time as evidence for the defense. It could, on the contrary, only serve to justify the complete state of distraction which we hope to achieve here before

Kant's absentmindedness regarding women; Pasteur's absentmindedness about 'grapes'; Curie's absentmindedness with respect to vehicles, are in this regard profoundly symptomatic. This world is only very relatively in tune with thought and action.

Louis Aragon (1897-1982) et al. 'Declaration of the Bureau de Recherches Surrealistes'

the beginning of 1925, the first two issues of the journal *La Révolution Surrealiste* were available, and Aragon's Surrealist 'novel' *Paysan de Paris* (Paris: Peasant) had been published in the *Revue Européenne. Works by Naville, Artaud, Eluard and others had also appeared. The intention of Surrealism was not, however, to be a mere literary movement, but a revolutionary cultural practice. To this end, later in 1925 the Surrealists common cause with the Communist journal *Clarté*. This attempt to transcend the limits of a merely artistic practice is prefigured by the 'Declaration issued under the signature of the Bureau de Recherches Surrealistes on 27 January 1925. The Declaration had twenty-six signatories in addition to Aragon, including Breton, Eluard, Naville, Sautré, Artaud, Ernst and Masson. The present translation by Richard Howard, is from Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, New York, 1965.*

In regard to a false interpretation of our enterprise, stupidly circulated among  
the public,

we declare as follows to the entire braying literary, dramatic, philosophical, ecclesiastical and even theological body of contemporary criticism: We have nothing to do with literature; but we are quite capable, when necessary, of making use of it like anyone else.

*Surrealism* is not a new means of expression, or an easier one, nor even a physic of poetry.

is a means of total liberation of the mind and of all that resembles it. We are determined to make a Revolution. We have joined the word *socialism* to the word *revolution*, so that no one can say that we are revolutionaries.

We make no claim to change the course of history; we only want to show  
the world that there is another way.

agility of thought, and on what shifting foundations, what caverns we have our trembling houses.

We must, in our formal warning to Society, Beware of your deviations and  
we shall not miss a single one.

We are specialists in Revolt. We say in particular to the Western world: *surrender now or fight*. And what is there to fight for? There is no means of action which we are not capable, when necessary, of using.